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HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
Fifty-first session

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 40 OF THE COVENANT

Comments of the Human Rights Committee

Jordan

1. The Committee considered the third periodic report of Jordan (CCPR/C/76/Add.1) at its 1321st to 1324th meetings, held on 5 and 6 July 1994, and adopted[1] the following comments:

A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the opportunity to continue its dialogue with the State party and thanks the Government of Jordan for its report (CCPR/C/76/Add.1) and core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.18/Rev.1). It notes that the report and core document did not contain sufficient information on the effective implementation of the provisions of the Covenant. However, the presence of a high-level delegation which provided additional information on many points not covered in the report enabled the Committee to obtain a better understanding of the human rights situation in Jordan and thus provided the basis for a frank and fruitful dialogue between the delegation and the Committee.

B. Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Covenant

3. The Committee takes note of the difficult economic and social situation faced by Jordan as a result of the Gulf crisis and lack of stability in the region. The presence of a very large number of refugees constitutes another factor which renders the implementation of the Covenant more difficult.

[1] At the 1354th meeting, held on 27 July 1994.

C. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the democratic process initiated in 1989, the lifting of the state of emergency, and the abolition of the Martial Law and the 1935 Defence Act, as well as the release of political prisoners, restitution of withdrawn passports, reinstatement of civil servants who had been dismissed for political reasons and the institution of a right to appeal against decisions of the State Security Court to the Supreme Court. The Committee also notes with satisfaction the existence of an appeal procedure to the Supreme Court against administrative decisions, including those concerning civil servants. The efforts to undertake a thorough legal reform have already yielded many accomplishments, in particular with respect to the new Press Act and Political Parties Act. The Committee also appreciates the creation of a Commission for human rights and the establishment of Jordanian sections of the Arab Organization for Human Right and Amnesty International. These new institutions and the drafting of new bills that may promote human rights, as well as the holding of multiparty elections, clearly illustrate the positive trend towards strengthening democracy and the promotion and protection of human rights in Jordan. Some progress made in recent years in promoting the status of women is also commendable and the notable achievements in the field of life expectancy together with reduction of child mortality rates are positive developments ensuring better respect of the right to life as provided for under article 6 of the Covenant.

D. Principal subjects of concern

5. The Committee notes that the Constitution does not contain specific provisions as to the relationship between international conventions and domestic law. Accordingly, there is a need to define the place of the Covenant within the Jordanian legal system to ensure that domestic law are construed in conformity with the provisions of the Covenant. Furthermore, it notes with concern that the general legal framework is still not in conformity with the provisions of the Covenant. The Committee also regrets that the Constitutional Court has not yet been established.

6. The Committee is concerned that the State Security Court continues to exercise special jurisdiction and that, in accordance with articles 124 and 125 of the Constitution and under the new Defence Act, ordinary law can be suspended in emergency situations, contrary to the provisions of article 4 of the Covenant which prohibit derogation from some categories of human rights. The lack of clarity with regard to accountability for acts performed under provisions of the Martial Law is also a matter of concern.

7. The Committee regrets that, although some improvement has been achieved as regards the status of women, the State party has not embarked on all the necessary reforms to combat the factors still impeding equality between men and women. It notes with concern that the Constitution does not guarantee the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex, and that there are still gender

disparities in law or practice with regard to such issues as status within the family, inheritance rights, the right to leave the country, the acquisition of Jordanian nationality, access to work and participation in the public life.

8. The Committee is concerned about the excessive number of offences punishable by the death penalty as well as the number of death sentences handed down by the Courts.

9. The Committee is also concerned that the guarantees contained in articles 7, 9, 10 and 14 of the Covenant are not fully complied with. In particular, it is concerned that torture and ill-treatment of persons deprived of liberty continue to be reported. Cases of administrative detention, denial of access of detainees to legal counsel, long periods of pre-trial detention without charges and incommunicado detention are also matters of great concern. The Committee is particularly concerned at conditions of detention in the General Intelligence Department headquarters.

10. The Committee notes with concern the shortcomings in the observance of the provisions of article 18 of the Covenant, in particular the restrictions affecting the enjoyment by non-recognized or non-registered religious denominations, including the Bahai's, of their right to freedom of religion or belief. Concern is also expressed about the practical limitations to the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, which should include the freedom to change religion.

11. The Committee also expresses concern that in spite of the positive developments resulting from the adoption of the new Press Act, freedom of expression is still restricted by the control exercised by the authorities over the State radio and television and by measures of harassment against some journalists. The Committee is also concerned that a rigid interpretation of the provisions of the new Press Act and Political Parties Act and prosecutions of offences of defamation might affect the effective enjoyment of those rights stipulated under articles 19 and 25 of the Covenant.

E. Suggestions and recommendations

12. The Committee recommends that the State party continue the legislative review envisaged by the National Charter and use this process to incorporate all substantive provisions of the Covenant into domestic law and ensure that the restrictions imposed under national legislation do not go beyond those permitted under the Covenant.

13. The Committee hopes that the Government of Jordan will consider becoming a party to the First Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

14. The Committee further recommends that Jordan envisages measures towards the abolition of the death penalty, including giving consideration to accession to the Second Optional Protocol.

15. The Committee emphasizes the need for the Government to prevent and eliminate discriminatory attitudes and prejudices towards women and to achieve the effective implementation of article 3 of the Covenant, by adopting promotional measures to overcome the weight of certain traditions and customs.

16. The Committee recommends that consideration be given to the abolition of the State Security Court; that the detention premises controlled by the Central Intelligence Department be placed under close supervision of the judicial authorities; that necessary measures be taken to make sure that torture, ill-treatment and illegal detention do not occur and that any such cases be investigated in order to bring before the courts those suspected of having committed such acts and to punish them if found guilty. It also recommends that measures of administrative detention and incommunicado detention be restricted to very limited and exceptional cases, and that the guarantees concerning pre-trial detention provided for in article 9, paragraph 3, of the Covenant be implemented.

17. The Committee emphasizes the need to take further measures to guarantee the freedom of religion and eliminate discrimination on religious grounds, and suggests in this connection that the State party take into account the recommendations contained in the Committee's general comment on article 18 of the Covenant.

18. The Committee stresses that further measures should be taken to ensure that the provisions of the Covenant be made more widely known. It urges the Government to prepare its fourth periodic report in compliance with the guidelines for the preparation of State party reports, taking into account the general comments adopted by the Committee. The fourth periodic report should contain detailed information on the extent to which each right protected under the Covenant is enjoyed in practice, and refer to specific factors and difficulties that might impede its application. It should also highlight measures taken to follow up on the Committee's suggestions and recommendations.

19. The Committee recommends that the Jordanian authorities should ensure that the report submitted by the State party and the comments of the Committee be disseminated as widely as possible in order to encourage the involvement of all sectors concerned in the improvement of human rights.